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1972/11/24

WD # 03221

SIGON 0279 241120Z

PRIVACY CHANNEL TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE November 24, 1972

ACTION: THE WHITE HOUSE IMMEDIATE 2279

EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY FOR HENRY A. KISSINGER FROM
BUNKER

1. Nha called on me yesterday to inform me that President Thieu would see me this morning, but this morning telephoned to say that Thieu was awaiting a report from Lam in Paris and would, therefore, postpone my appointment until this afternoon. In the meantime, I have received a letter from Nha written at Thieu's direction saying that Thieu has received the President's letter and is awaiting more complete reports from Ambassador Lam in Paris on the meetings held November 22-23 before replying to the President. Thieu also instructed Nha to transmit the following additional points:

2. Thieu has instructed Ambassador Lam in Paris to ask you whether you had discussed with the communist side Thieu's proposition related "to the total withdrawal from South Viet-Nam of North Vietnamese troops within the same period of time as the allied troops and agreement by the GVN to demobilize immediately after complete withdrawals an equal number of GVN forces". President Thieu considers this a great concession of the GVN and has made this proposal with the view of achieving more positive

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results from the talks.

3. In addition to this proposal, i. e., the total withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from South Viet-Nam and the demobilization by ARVN of an equal number, Thieu has also instructed Ambassador Lam to say^{to} you that, after this first phase, and when the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam holds direct discussions with the NLF on the internal political solutions for South Viet-Nam, the GVN is prepared to reduce ARVN strength and demobilize its troops in parallel and equally with the South Vietnamese members of the NLF forces. The GVN and the NLF will discuss and agree on the number and timing of this demobilization.
4. According to Lam's report on November 22 as a result of the second meeting between you and Le Duc Tho November 21, the communists had agreed to change practically nothing and still remained intransigent, most specifically on the "two life and death problems for us", i. e., the three equal components in the CNRC and the non-withdrawal of NVA troops. In the light of this intransigence, the GVN feels that it is very difficult to make any further proposal or counterproposal. Also on other points which the GVN has asked to be changed, such as the reference to the three countries of Indochina, North Viet-Nam still maintains its position. (In this connection it would be helpful if we could know what changes have

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been agreed to.)

5. For these reasons, President Thieu believes that unless the meetings on November 22-23 produce other elements, especially unless North Viet-Nam makes known its views on the GVN proposal to withdraw NVA troops and to demobilize the ARVN as mentioned above, there is no element which encourages him to contribute more ideas to you in Paris or to me in Saigon. He hopes to receive today your answers concerning this problem from Paris or answers from the USG in Washington.

6. Concerning the points which the President raised in his letter to President Thieu on November 23, Thieu has asked Nha to inform me that:

1) Concerning the "press campaign emanating from Saigon"

Nha offers to explain the origin and content of the news

which we considered to be "unfounded attacks on the draft agreement" or the personal attacks against Dr. Kissinger.

(We have just recieved a press release from the Ministry of Information denying that personal attacks have been made by Radio Saigon against Dr. Kissinger. Although the denial is a lie it shows that Thieu was stung by the President's letter into calming down his propagandists.)

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2) Concerning the "dilatatory tactics", it is not the policy of the GVN to engage in such tactics. Rather it is because President Thieu wanted to know the reaction of the communist side to his "new very forthcoming proposal relating to the total withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops and reduction of the ARVN strengths."

3) The reason for the delay concerning the protocols related to the draft agreement is the fact that the USG envisages the protocols on the basis of the NVA troops having the right to stay in South Viet-Nam while the GVN envisages protocols as based on the total withdrawal of NVA troops from South Viet-Nam into North Viet-Nam.

Therefore, if the basic problem of withdrawal is not resolved clearly, it will be difficult for the GVN military staff to work on the related points in the protocols.

7. Finally, Thieu asked me to report to the President that he denies completely points raised by the President in his letter according to which President Thieu is engaging in dilatatory tactics in an effort to scuttle the agreement.

8. Comment: Thieu seems to feel that he has made a "major concession" in his proposal to reduce RVNAF troops to correspond to the withdrawal of NVA troops and to follow up with a further

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demobilization in parallel with NLF demobilization. There appears, however, to be no "give" in his position on NVA withdrawal. In fact, if anything, his position seems to have hardened, encouraged probably by the fact that he feels he has widespread support for his position and is encouraged by hardliners such as Vice President Huong. It seems to me, as reported in Saigon 0267, November 13, that assuming Thieu concludes the terms we are able to secure in Paris are unacceptable, he has two alternatives:

-- Decide to go it alone, believing that we may make a separate agreement with Hanoi, but that the logistical support we have provided to RVNAF would enable them to carry on the war at least for the immediate future. He probably hopes that we would continue to give him military and economic support, although he knows that we would not provide any air and naval support.

-- That after we have done our utmost to secure the changes he has requested, he will accede to the agreement because he realizes that he has no other viable alternative, indicating that he has felt compelled to do so since there is no other way available to him. At the same time, he would call on the nationalists to close ranks in anticipation of the forthcoming political contest with the NLF. He might wish to

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attach a demurrer indicating the points in the agreement with which he disagreed.

9. I thought then, November 13, that Thieu was most likely to follow the second course. I still think this is the more probable, particularly if the President holds to his determination, as clearly expressed in his letters to Thieu, to proceed to a final agreement. On the other hand, given Thieu's public statements in criticism of the agreement which have continued unabated and encouraged by widespread support which he himself has stimulated he may have gotten himself into a position from which it will be difficult, if not impossible, for him to retreat. All of us, I think, have done our best to keep him from painting himself into a corner, but I am not sure at this point whether we have succeeded. Nevertheless, preparations by the GVN in anticipation of a ceasefire are going ahead unabated, in fact are being accelerated. The military commanders are taking the prospect of a ceasefire calmly and do not seem to be disturbed by it; in fact, they seem to be less disturbed by the prospect than the government in Saigon, although they, too, strongly support the demand for withdrawal of NVA forces from South Viet-Nam. This could be interpreted as indicating that Thieu understands that ultimately he will have to go along.

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10. Warm regards.

BUNKE R

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